THE "LITTLE MEN" PLAY

THE "LITTLE MEN" PLAY

A Two-Act, Forty-five-Minute Play

ADAPTED BY

ELIZABETH LINCOLN GOULD

FROM

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S FAMOUS STORY

"Little Men"

WITH PICTURES BY REGINALD B. BIRCH

Illustrator of "Little Lord Fauntleroy"

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

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The PEOPLE *in the* PLAY

PROFESSOR BHAER.

MRS. BHAER.

DAISY.

MAN.

FESS.

TEDDY.

TOMMY.

DEMI.

NAT.

DAN.

COSTUMES *for* PLAY

Act One

Professor Bhaer: Shabby suit, well worn, loose house coat.

Mrs. Bhaer: Dark gown, big apron with pockets.

Nan: Gingham dress, sunbonnet.

Demi, Tommy, Nat, Dan: Ordinary schoolboy's suits. Dan dressed to look older than the others.

Teddy: Kilts and blouse waist.

Act Two

Professor Bhaer: Same as in Act One.

Mrs. Bhaer: Dark gown, red ribbon bow at throat, white muslin apron.

Daisy: Dark blue (or black) skirt trailing on ground, bright-colored shawl crossed over a white waist, ends tied together behind; pair

of spectacles, large pocket-handke pinned to a ribbon belt at her left white ruffled cap with bright red bow.

NAN: Bright green (or red) skirt (long), waist, yellow scarf tied around neck, flo ends, wreath of artificial flowers on old pink (or white) slippers; fan mad feathers from duster hanging by string waist; large smelling-bottle also hun string.

BESS: Pink or pale blue frock, white apron high ruffles over shoulders, pretty slippe

DEMI, NAT, TOMMY: Same suits as in One, but with high paper collars, tall hats, and bright, unmatched gloves.

DAN: Same as in Act One.

TEDDY: Same as in Act One.

Directions as to right and left are given from the not from the audience.

THE "LITTLE MEN" PLAY

THE FIRST ACT

[*Room in* BHAER'S *house. Maps on walls. In back of room, desk, with schoolbooks and writing materials on it, chair behind it. At right of desk, facing it, eight or ten straight-backed chairs, in two rows. Door at rear, and one at left. As curtain rises,* NAT *is discovered standing before desk, eyes fixed on map of United States on wall. He has hands in pockets and looks mournful.*

NAT

It 's no use! The boys don't believe I 'm telling the truth. They all

think I stole Tommy's egg-money all except Daisy; she told D maybe the hens ate it. Ned said Dan *might* have done it, bec he knows Dan's my best friend, he wants to hurt my feelings.

[*Drops into chair on the right nearest of room, takes out his harmonica an gins to play. If he can play the fiddl should be on desk when curtain rises.*

[*Enter* DAN *from door at left.*

DAN

(*goes to* NAT *and puts hand on shoulder.* NAT *stops playing*)

I 've just given Ned a good d ing in the brook for pestering I don't believe he 'll trouble you more; if he does, just tell me I 'll see to him (*fiercely*).

Dan

AT *puts harmonica in his pocket, goes to desk and leans against it.* DAN *walks around the room as they talk, hands behind his back.*

NAT

I did lie sometimes, before Father haer cured me. I don't mind so ch what he says about me, but I e to have him pitch into you.

DAN

(*looking away from* NAT)
How do you know he is n't right?

NAT

(*with a glance at* DAN)
What, about the money?

DAN

Yes.

NAT

(*laughing and shaking his head*)

Oh, I 'd never believe a word of that! You don't care for money; all you want is your old bugs and things!

DAN

(*stopping at desk and turning leaves of schoolbook*)

I want a butterfly net as much as you want a good fiddle. Why should n't I steal the money for it as much as you?

NAT

You would n't do it. You like to fight and knock folks around sometimes, but you don't lie, and I don't believe you 'd steal.

DAN

(*beginning to walk again and speaking in hard rough voice*)

I 've done both. I used to fib like everything, and I stole things to eat out of gardens when I was tramping back here after I ran away from Page's, so you see I *am* a bad lot.

NAT

(*in a distressed tone*)

Oh, Dan! don't say it 's you. I 'd rather have it any of the other boys!

DAN

(*stops to look at* NAT *with half-pleased expression*)

I won't say anything about it. But don't you fret and we 'll pull through somehow; see if we don't.

NAT

(*puts both hands around* DAN'S *arm and looks at him imploringly*)

I think you know who did it. If you do, beg him to tell, Dan. It 's so hard to have them all hate me for nothing. I don't think I *can* bear it much longer. If I had any place to go I 'd run away, though I love Plumfield dearly ; but I 'm not brave and big like you, so I must stay and wait till some one shows them that I have n't lied.

[*Turns and goes quickly out of door at left as* MRS. BHAER *enters from door at rear.*

MRS. BHAER

(*holds out her hand to* DAN, *who takes it. She shakes hands heartily as she talks*)

Mrs. Bhaer

I'm glad to find you here, Dan. See what a good report you have this week.

[*Opens book which she takes from drawer in desk, shows* DAN *page of it, runs her finger down page and smiles at him.*

DAN

(*wistfully*)

You think I am getting on, don't you?

MRS. BHAER

Excellently, Dan! I am so pleased because I thought from the very first day you came here that you only needed a little help to make you a boy to be proud of. You are *my* boy now, you know.

DAN

(*huskily*)

You 've been mighty good to me.

TEDDY

(*voice outside*)

Where 's my Danny ?

[*Enter* TEDDY *from rear door. He runs straight to* DAN.

TEDDY

Take me up, Danny ! Take your Teddy up !

[DAN *stoops, picks up child and seats him on his shoulder.*

MRS. BHAER

(*patting* TEDDY'S *cheek*)

Ted and I know about our Danny, don't we ?

TEDDY

(*putting arms about* DAN'S *neck*)

Mummy and I, *we* know !

DAN

May I take him out for a while, Mother Bhaer?

MRS. BHAER

Yes, indeed, I 'd be delighted to have you. I can always trust Teddy with you, dear.

DAN

(*starts for door at rear, turns just before he goes out*)

I 'm afraid you 'll be disappointed in me, but I do try.

[*Exit* DAN, TEDDY *on his shoulder.*

MRS. BHAER

(*turning over papers on desk*)

Poor Dan! He feels Nat's disgrace keenly. I do wish I knew the

truth about that dollar of Tommy Bangs'! (*Enter* TOMMY *with his right hand wrapped in handkerchief.*) Tommy, come here and tell me all over again about that money. Mercy on us, child, what have you done to yourself?

TOMMY

I got a big splinter in my hand; Nan took it out for me with a darning-needle. (*Unwraps handkerchief and shows hand to* MRS. BHAER.) She did first-rate, but she had to jab a good deal and made it bleed.

MRS. BHAER

I should think so. Here, let me tie it up for you. (*Puts her hand in apron pocket and takes out strip of cloth.*)

Now tell me again about your dollar, Tommy. I paid you for the four dozen eggs, and you took the money to the barn, and then what happened?

TOMMY

(*fastens his eyes on* MRS. BHAER'S *face and speaks rapidly*)

I showed the four quarters to Nat, and he said he wished he had 'em to put with his three dollars toward his fiddle, and I said "P'r'aps I 'll lend you some money." And then the boys called out for us to go down to the brook and see a big snake that Dan had got. So I put the money down inside the winnowing machine, and Nat and I ran. Well, the snake was fine, and then we chased a lame

crow and caught him for Dan to tame, and I never thought of that money again till next morning. And when I went to look for it — 't was n't there!

MRS. BHAER

And Nat was the only one who knew where the money was?

TOMMY

Yes, 'm, at least I did n't tell anybody else.

MRS. BHAER

I thought some tramp might have slept in the barn, but Silas says not, for he keeps such watch.

TOMMY

By thunder turtles, I wish I knew

Nat did n't take it. Here we 've had to give up being partners, and I 've taken down my sign — " T. Bangs and Company."

[DEMI *enters from door at left, running.*

DEMI

(*waving his right hand*)

See here, Tommy! (*Opens his hand to show paper.*) Look at this! I just found it out in the barn! 'T was in the old winnowing machine just where you left your money!

TOMMY

(*takes paper and opens it to show four quarters.* MRS. BHAER *and* DEMI *stand behind him*)

Thunder turtles! It 's my money! It 's all right. Where 's Nat?

[*Rushes out of door at left.*

DEMI

I don't see how it got back there, do you, Aunt Jo? Do you suppose the one that stole it put it back?

MRS. BHAER

(*looking anxious*)

I don't know, I 'm sure, Demi.

[*They stand looking perplexed for a moment. Door at left opens and in come* TOMMY *and* NAT, *arm in arm, followed by* PROFESSOR BHAER *and* DAN.

MRS. BHAER

(*holds out her hand to* NAT *and draws him toward her*)

My dear boy, I 'm so glad the money is found, and you and Tommy can hunt eggs together again, and "T. Bangs and Company" will do business as they did before. But,

Professor Bhaer

Fritz (*turns to* PROFESSOR BHAER, *who stands with* DAN *just inside door*), who do you suppose put the money back? What is the matter?

[*She hurries over to* PROFESSOR BHAER, *puts hands on his arms, gives him little shake.* DAN *turns his face away from all.* DEMI, TOMMY, *and* NAT *stand in centre looking at others.*

PROFESSOR BHAER

My dear, Mrs. Bates has just sent me a parcel with a note. The parcel was the book about butterflies that Uncle Teddy gave Dan; Mrs. Bates writes that her boy Jimmy says he bought it of Dan last night for a dollar. She knows it is worth much more, and has sent the book back, thinking there was some mistake.

MRS. BHAER

(*goes to* DAN, *puts hand on his shoulder and makes him look at her*)

Why, Dan, did you sell that book — that beautiful book you 're so fond of?

DAN

Yes, 'm.

MRS. BHAER

Why?

DAN

Wanted money.

[*Other boys draw nearer.*

MRS. BHAER

For what?

[*She draws* DAN *toward desk, sits down on chair behind desk.* DAN *stands, hands behind, looking down.* PROFESSOR BHAER *motions other three boys to chairs at right. He stands behind* MRS. BHAER, *looking at* DAN.

DAN

To pay somebody.

MRS. BHAER

To whom did you owe it?

DAN

Tommy.

TOMMY

(*starts and then sits down at motion from* PROFESSOR)

Never borrowed a cent of me in his life!

NAT

(*anxiously*)

Dan, you did n't take Tommy's money? *Say* you did n't!

DAN

Suppose I can't say it?

MRS. BHAER

Tell *me*, Dan! Surely you never touched that money?

[DAN *does not raise head.* MRS. BHAER *covers her face.*

PROFESSOR BHAER

It is a hard thing to do, but I must have this settled, for I cannot have you watching each other like detectives, and the whole school disturbed. Dan, did you put that dollar in the barn this morning?

DAN

(*looking* PROFESSOR *straight in the eyes*)
I did.

[MRS. BHAER *hurriedly rises, leaves room by rear door; as she opens door,* TEDDY *tries to rush by.*

TEDDY

I want my Danny!

MRS. BHAER

(*catching him up with a sob*)

Not now, dear.

[*Goes out and shuts door.*

PROFESSOR BHAER

I 'm sorry to hear this, Dan.

[TOMMY *and* DEMI *are talking in low tones together.* NAT *has left his seat and stands close to* DAN. DAN *throws back his head, folds his arms.*

DAN

(*to* PROFESSOR BHAER)

I did it; now you may do what you like to: I won't say another word about it.

PROFESSOR BHAER

Not even that you are sorry?

DAN

I 'm not sorry.

TOMMY

I'll forgive him without his asking.

DAN

(*gruffly*)

Don't want to be forgiven.

PROFESSOR BHAER

Perhaps you will when you have thought about it quietly by yourself. I won't tell you now how surprised and disappointed I am, but by and by I will come up and talk to you in your room.

DAN

Won't make any difference.

[*He turns and walks quickly out of door at left, followed by* NAT; PROFESSOR BHAER *turns to* TOMMY *and* DEMI.

PROFESSOR BHAER

Leave them alone for a while, boys.

Tommy

There 's something strange about this. I cannot believe that Dan really stole the money.

TOMMY

(*stoutly*)

I *know* he did n't, sir.

PROFESSOR BHAER

Well, time will clear this thing up.

TOMMY

(*eagerly*)

I 'd trust Dan as I would you, sir!

PROFESSOR BHAER

(*smiles*)

Thank you.

TOMMY

Oh — I — I —

PROFESSOR BHAER

Never mind, I know what you mean.

[*Gathers papers from desk, goes out door at rear.* TOMMY *takes jackknife from pocket and tosses it as he talks.* DEMI *goes to desk, gets pencils and waste-basket, and sharpens pencil with knife taken from desk.*

DEMI

I know Aunt Jo will be glad to have these sharpened, and I 'd like to do *something*. I can't think about anything but that dollar of yours, all the time.

TOMMY

Neither can I. I 'm just sure Dan did n't take it. Don't you know Nat always said Dan was as honest as the day is long, even when he was so poor and sold papers in the streets and had n't enough to eat. Nat said

everybody trusted him. Of course I know now that Nat did n't take it, and I 'm glad. Old Cockletop has n't laid half so many eggs since our partnership was dissolved.

DEMI

Oh, dear, I do hope it will get straightened out! There 's Daisy's party to-morrow afternoon, and Nan is here for a week, and we were going to have such fun!

TOMMY

I know it. Nan 's *most* as good as a boy. Say, Demi, where 's Daisy's invitation? Let 's look at it.

[DEMI *takes things back to desk; sits in desk chair, draws crumpled paper from*

pocket, straightens it out on desk. TOMMY *goes over and stands behind him.*

DEMI

(*reading*)

"Mrs. Shakespeare Smith would like to have Mr. John Brooke, Mr. Thomas Bangs, and Mr. Nathaniel Blake to come to her ball at five o'clock to-morrow. P. S.—And perhaps Dan would come too.

"N. B.—Nat must bring his harmonica, so we can dance, and all the boys must be good, or they can't have any of the nice things we shall cook."

TOMMY

They are cooking lots of good things to-day, to get ready for us. I know, for I 've smelt 'em.

[TOMMY *and* DEMI *go arm in arm to door at rear, open it a crack, put their heads out and come back sniffing.*

DEMI

Should n't you say one of those smells was ginger cookies, Tommy?

TOMMY

No doubt about it, Mr. John Brooke.

[*They take up invitation and hold it together, looking at it.*

DEMI

It seems to me we'd better accept, don't you think so?

TOMMY

Yes. But how about Nat and Dan? Of course, Dan can't go till they find out about the money, and I 'm afraid Nat won't want to. Here he comes now.

[*Enter* NAT *slowly from door at left.*

NAT

Mrs. Bhaer says she is n't going to cry any more, for she knows it will all come out right; she 's sure Dan did n't steal your money, though she can't understand why he put the four quarters in the winnowing machine.

TOMMY

She 's a real trump, is n't she? Come here, Nat, and see this invitation.

[*Hands paper to* NAT, *and they nudge each other as he reads.*

TOMMY

What do you think of it?

NAT

Why, it sounds nice, but I never went to a ball. What shall we have to do?

TOMMY

Why, we just play we are men, and sit around stiff and stupid like grown-up folks, and say, "How's your mother and all the rest of the family?" and speak about the weather and things like that; then of course we've got to dance some to please the girls. After that's over we eat up everything and come away as soon as we can. I should think perhaps we ought to stay ten minutes after supper to be polite, should n't you, Demi?

DEMI

(*doubtfully*)

I'm afraid that would n't be long enough. It *sounds* short.

TOMMY

Well, then, we 'll make it fifteen; I 'm sure that 's long enough for anybody. I 'll look at my watch — under the table, so (*takes out watch, stoops, and holds it under desk and looks at it*), and when it 's time I 'll say, "Well, boys, I 'm afraid we 're tiring the ladies, and we 'd better be going." I 've heard folks say that to my mother. Then we can all take our hats, shake hands all around and say we 've had a splendid time, and get right out.

DEMI

We ought to *back* out, to be *extra* polite, I suppose; that 's what Daisy says Aunt Amy told her once, and Dess can do it finely.

Demi

TOMMY

Thunder turtles! I shall fall into the door or something if I try to back out.

NAT

So shall I. If we go very fast, do you think they 'd notice which way we were facing?

DEMI

We might try backing out now. Let 's get in line and pretend the desk is Mrs. Shakespeare Smith, and bow and back out. I 'll go first and open the door.

[*Three boys stand in line, bow toward desk, and back toward rear door,* DEMI *running into* MRS. BHAER, *who opens door and comes in.*

3

Children's Room.

MRS. BHAER

What in the world are you boys doing?

DEMI, TOMMY, and NAT

(*in chorus*)

We're practising for Daisy's — Mrs. Shakespeare Smith's — party!

MRS. BHAER

(*laughing*)

Oh, I don't believe Mrs. Shakespeare Smith will demand your most elaborate manners. If you are polite and good-natured, that will be quite enough. Can any of you tell me where Nan is?

DEMI

She played "I spy" with Tommy and me right after dinner, but finally she ran off and left us.

[MRS. BHAER *and boys stand in group in front of desk.*

MRS. BHAER

She 's been fretting all day about her bandbox, because it has n't come from the station, and she wants her battledore and shuttlecock, she says.

TOMMY

I saw her going down the driveway as hard as she could pelt, about an hour ago.

MRS. BHAER

(*anxiously*)

I wonder if that little gypsy has run home.

DEMI

Perhaps she 's gone to the station to look after her bandbox.

MRS. BHAER

That 's impossible. She does n't know the way, and if she found it she could never carry that heavy box a mile all by herself.

[TEDDY *comes running in from rear.*

TEDDY

Oh, mummy, Nan is coming with her big, big box! She 's most in the house now.

MRS. BHAER

That child! What shall I do with her? Which way was she coming in, Teddy?

[*All hurry to rear door. Just then* NAN *bursts in at door at left, red in the face, covered with dust, carries a big box tied up in a linen bag; her sunbonnet has*

fallen off. Sets box down in middle of room. MRS. BHAER *holds up both hands, then begins to laugh; boys all laugh too.* NAN *drops on floor beside box.*

NAN

(*crossing her arms, and looking up at* MRS. BHAER, *who stands over her*)

There! I could n't wait any longer, so I went and got it!

[TEDDY *examines box.* TOMMY *steps near* MRS. BHAER.

TOMMY

But you did n't know the way.

NAN

Oh, I found it; I never get lost.

TOMMY

: 's a mile; how could you go so

NAN

Well, it was pretty far, but I rested a good deal.

NAT

(*steps beside* TOMMY)

Was n't it very heavy ?

NAN

Um-m. It 's so round I could n't get a good hold of it, and I *did* think my arms would break right off.

MRS. BHAER

(*stoops to wipe dust off* NAN's *face*)

I don't see how the station-master let you have it, Nan.

NAN

I did n't say anything to him. He was selling tickets and did n't see me, so I just took it off the platform.

Nan

MRS. BHAER

Boys, go down and tell him it is all right, or he'll think it is stolen. The walk won't hurt you.

[*Boys go off by door at left, except* TEDDY, *who has seated himself on* NAN'S *box.*

MRS. BHAER

(*holding out her hand to* NAN)

Come, dear, get up now and we 'll try to make you a little cooler and cleaner before supper. Another time you must wait, for you will get in trouble if you run away. Promise me this, or I sha'n't dare trust you out of my sight.

NAN

(*gets up and throws her arms around* MRS. BHAER)

Oh, I don't believe I 'll ever want to again, I 'm *so* tired! I would n't say so before the boys, of course.

MRS. BHAER

Of course not!

[*Puts her arm around* NAN. TEDDY *gets up from the bandbox and is trying to lift it as curtain falls.*

The Second Act

[*Playroom in* Bhaer's *house. Table in centre of room set for tea, six chairs of different kinds, including one rocking-chair, placed around three sides of table. One straight-backed chair against each of three sides of room. Door at rear and left side as in Act I. Any pictures or ornaments suitable for playroom. Curtain rises to discover* Daisy *setting a pitcher on the table,* Nan *taking a plate of cakes from cupboard in right-hand corner,* Bess *seated in chair against rear wall.*

Daisy

There! if they don't think that molasses and water is just delicious, I shall be dreadfully disappointed!

NAN

I guess they 'll like it well enough. But our cups are pretty small, I think. (*Sets plate of cakes on table, and lifts one of cups.*) Tommy Bangs could drink up about ten of those full, I believe.

DAISY

(*decidedly*)

Well, he *can't*. There 's enough in the pitcher for each boy to have five, and each girl two, and that 's *all* there is, and Tommy can't have any more than his five cups. How many ginger cookies are there?

NAN

(*lifts one plate of cookies*, DAISY *another. Both count.*)

Twenty-two on my plate.

Daisy

DAISY

And twenty-one on mine. That makes — one and two are three, and two and two are four — forty-three.

NAN

Six in forty-three is seven and one over, and girls like cookies *just* as well as boys; but of course *they* are company, and they 're always *so* hungry!

[*Both look perplexed.* BESS, *who has almost tumbled off chair in anxiety to see cookies, gives little cough. Both turn toward her.*

NAN

You precious little Princess! Daisy, let 's give her the extra cooky this minute.

[*Both hurry to her.* DAISY *feeds* "PRINCESS" *with small pieces of cooky, while* NAN *holds her hands under child's chin to catch crumbs.*

BESS

(*during process of eating*)

It 's a lovely cooky! It *is* a lovely cooky! Thank you very much.

NAN

(*picking up crumb from floor*)

That 's the only one that fell. We ought to have had her eat over the waste-basket, but I guess there was n't any need.

DAISY

Now I think we 'd better sit down and rest, don't you? (NAN *nods, goes to chair at right,* DAISY *to one at left; sit*

down carefully and fold hands.) I suppose Aunt Jo knew best when she said to have supper first, and dance afterward.

NAN

Yes, indeed. Those boys' minds would n't have been on the dancing one bit; and I 'm a *little* hungry myself.

DAISY

So am I.

BESS

(*softly*)

So am I — but that *was* a lovely cooky; thank you.

[*Both smile at her.*

NAN

Demi and Nat will be good, I know; but Tommy will do something bad I know he will! (*Shakes head.*)

DAISY

Then I shall send him right straight home.

NAN

People don't do that at parties; 't is n't proper.

DAISY

It will be done at *my* party if Tommy Bangs does n't behave! He ought to be good as can be after you 've got so many splinters out for him!

NAN

(*with sniff*)

Boys are n't very grateful; and anyway I like to take out splinters and things, I just enjoy it!

DAISY

I love to keep house, and I mean

to have a nice one for Demi when we grow up and live together.

NAN

Well, I have n't any brother. I shall be a doctor, and have an office, with lots of bottles, and I shall drive around in a horse and chaise. That will be *such* fun.

DAISY

(*with shudder*)

Ugh ! how can you bear the bad-smelling stuff and the nasty little powders and castor oil and senna and hive syrup !

NAN

I sha'n't have to take any, so I don't care. Besides, they make people well, and I like to cure folks.

Did n't my sage tea cure Mother Bhaer's headache, and did n't my hops stop Nat's toothache in five hours?

DAISY

Shall you put leeches on people, and cut off their legs and —

BESS

(*anxiously*)

And pull out their teeth?

NAN

Yes, I shall do everything; I don't care if people are all smashed up, I shall mend them.

BESS

(*admiringly*)

You *are* a brave girl, Nan!

DAISY

I 'm sorry for sick people, and like to nurse them, but it makes my legs shake so. I 'm not a brave girl — (*sighs*).

BESS

(*gets down from chair and runs to* DAISY: *puts arms around* DAISY'S *neck*)

You 're my dear Cousin Daisy, and I love you! (*standing at* DAISY'S *knee*). Why is n't Teddy's Danny coming to your party?

DAISY

(*looking at* NAN)

Uncle Fritz thought he 'd better not.

BESS

I 'm sorry; I like Teddy's Danny.

NAN

(*gets up and begins to walk back and forth, waving fan*)

So do Daisy and I, don't we, Daisy?

DAISY

(*soberly*)

Yes, indeed, we do.

[*Door at rear bursts open to show* TEDDY *grasping* DAN'S *coat, trying to pull him in.* DAN *has flowers in hand.*

TEDDY

(*breathlessly*)

Here's my Danny, and he won't come in, and you didn't 'vite me to your party, but Danny wanted me to knock on the door and say Here's a posy for the Princess.

BESS

(*runs to door, drops curtsy to* DAN, *then holds up hand for flowers*)

" Please walk in, gemplemum ; it's all ready ! "

Oh, what pretty flowers! Thank you, Teddy's Danny, ever and ever so much!

DAN

(*hands her posy*)

You 're welcome, Princess.

BESS

(*wistfully*)

Are n't you coming to the party?

DAN

(*lifting* TEDDY *to shoulder, turning to go*)

No, I can't. (DAISY *and* NAN *have been edging nearer door.*)

DAISY and NAN

(*together*)

We 're real sorry, Dan!

DAN

(*shutting door*)

Oh, I 'm all right. Never mind about me. Nat 's coming.

BESS

(*as door shuts, turns to others*)

Is something the matter with Teddy's Danny?

DAISY

(*puts arm around* PRINCESS)

Just now there is, dear, but Aunt Jo says she knows it will all come right.

[*Door at rear opens to show* MRS. BHAER'S *head.*

MRS. BHAER

(*in loud whisper*)

Girls, your company is on the way! Are you all ready?

DAISY, NAN, and BESS

Yes, 'm!

[MRS. BHAER *shuts door.* BESS *stands near it.* NAN *shakes out her skirt, stands*

at right. DAISY *straightens cap, stands at left. Knock is heard.*

DAISY and NAN

(*loud whisper*)

Open the door, Princess.

[BESS *opens door, still holding her posy, drops curtsy to three boys* — DEMI, *first, then* TOMMY, *then* NAT.

BESS

Please walk in, gemplemum; it 's all ready!

DAISY

(*holds out hand to* DEMI, *who takes off hat, shakes hands solemnly*)

I 'm glad to see you this evening, Mr. Brooke. My daughter *Miss* Shakespeare Smith (*waves hand toward* NAN).

DEMI

(*shakes hands with* NAN)

I 'm pleased to meet you, miss — no, ma'am — no, miss!

[TOMMY *shakes hands with* DAISY.

TOMMY

Very pleased to meet you, marm — and your daughter — (*turns to* NAN *and begins to laugh; smothers it, stands looking at her*).

NAT

(*timidly*)

Good-evening, Mrs. Shakespeare Smith.

DAISY

(*shaking hands*)

Good-evening, Mr. Blake. Did you bring your instrument, sir?

NAT

Yes, ma'am; it 's in my pocket.

DAISY

(*waves hand toward* NAN)

My daughter, sir.

NAT

Yes, 'm (*shakes hands with* NAN).

[*All stand stiffly looking at each other.* TOMMY *laughs out loud.*

DAISY

Oh, don't, Mr. Bangs.

NAN

(*raps* TOMMY'S *shoulder with smelling-bottle*)

You can't ever come again if you act so!

TOMMY

I can't help it. You look so like fury!

NAN

So do you, but I should n't be so

rude as to say so! He sha'n't come to the dinner-ball if he is n't polite, shall he, Daisy?

DAISY

(*gently*)

I believe he 'll be polite.

[*Boys take off gloves, and put hats on chair at right.*

DAISY

Now, will you please all be seated? Mr. Bangs, will you sit here? (*Points to chair at right.* TOMMY *sits down, then hastily rises, and stands behind chair.*) Princess, will you please sit next Mr. Bangs in that high-chair? (BESS *goes to chair.*) Mr. Brooke, please sit next Princess. (DEMI *goes to chair.* BESS *turns to him.*)

BESS

Please hold my chair when I get

Nat

up into it, Cousin Demi, 'cause one leg wiggles.

DEMI

Yes, indeed, I will, Princess.

DAISY

Miss Smith — daughter — please take the chair beside Mr. Brooke. (NAN *goes to chair, waving fan.*) And, Mr. Blake, please sit between Miss Smith and me. (NAT *has rocking-chair.*) Now, then, let's all sit down at the same time.

[*All seat themselves.* TOMMY *and* DAISY, *at extreme right and left, have chairs a little farther from table than* BESS *and* NAT, *so all may be seen.*

TOMMY

I call this a first-rate ball. Sandwiches and cake and ginger cookies

to eat; and there is something in that pitcher, I guess.

NAN

It is n't proper to speak about what you're going to eat.

TOMMY

Why is n't it?

NAN

I don't exactly know, but it *is n't*.

DAISY

I think it 's real nice to know if people like what you give them. Mr. Blake, will you please pour some of what is in that pitcher into the cups, and we 'll pass them.

[NAT *pours carefully from pitcher, and cups are passed from one to another.*

TOMMY

(*drinking a sip from his cup, then setting it down*)

Excuse me, Mrs. Smith, for tasting this — this excellent article, before the others. What is the name of it?

DAISY

Aunt Jo said we'd better call it nectar — but of course it 's — it 's —

TOMMY

(*nods*)

Molasses and water, ma'am, I understand.

NAN

(*passes sandwiches*)

There are three sandwiches apiece, so, Mr. Bangs, if you take all at once, you can't have any more!

TOMMY

(*indignantly*)

I hope I have *some* manners, Miss Smith!

NAN

(*tosses head*)

I hope so, I'm sure.

DAISY

(*hastily*)

Now let 's all begin to eat.

TOMMY

(*eating*)

It 's a shame Dan could n't come. I know it was n't he that took —

DEMI

(*quickly*)

S-sh, please.

DAISY

(*nervously*)

Is n't it a pleasant evening, Mr.

Bess

Bangs — and Mr. Blake — and Mr. Brooke?

THE THREE BOYS

Yes, marm.

DAISY

Mr. Brooke, please pass the ginger cookies, and, Mr. Bangs, please pass the cake.

NAN

(*pulls paper out of front of dress*)

Uncle Fritz told me I might write a composition, same as all the rest of you, as long as I'm staying here. And I am quite sure it would do you *all* good to hear it. (*Looks severely at* TOMMY.)

TOMMY

Can I eat while you read?

NAN

(*loftily*)

If there 's anything left, and Mrs. Smith is willing.

DAISY

(*anxiously*)

Do *please* begin to read, Nan. There 's one more cooky apiece, and we can eat slowly, and make them last.

TOMMY

Is it an awful long composition ?

NAN

You will have to wait and see, Mr. Bangs. (*All eat cookies while she reads.*) "The sponge, my friends, is the cause of my composition."

TOMMY

You mean subject, not cause.

NAN

I guess I know what I mean, Mr. Bangs!

THE OTHERS

Please go on!

NAN

The sponge is a most useful and inter — inter*est*ing plant. It grows on rocks under the water, and is a kind of seaweed. People go and pick it and dry it and wash it, because little fish and insects live in the holes. I found shells in my new one, and sand. The sponge has many uses. I will relate some of them. One use is to wash the face; I don't like it myself, but I *do* it, because I wish to be clean. Some people don't, and then their hands are dirty. (*Frowns at* TOMMY.)

TOMMY

(*spreads out hands*)
They 're clean.

NAN

I 'm glad to hear it ; they are n't *always*. Another use is to wake people up ; I mean boys *particularly*. (*Glances severely at* NAT *and* DEMI.)

NAT and DEMI

Do you mean me ?

NAN

'T would n't be polite for me to say — in a composition ; but I don't mean *anybody else*. (*All giggle.*) Some boys do not get up when they are called, and Mary Ann squeezes the water out of a sopping wet sponge on their faces. (*All laugh.*)

NAN

(*proceeding calmly*)

One more nice thing is done with sponges, and this is when doctors put ether on it, and hold it to people's noses. I shall do this when I am bigger, and give ether so people will go to sleep and not feel me cut off their legs.

BESS

(*buries face in posy*)

Oh dear!

NAN

There is n't any more of that part, you darling little Princess, not right out plain. The rest is three important morals, my friends. (TOMMY *gives loud groan.*) First, keep your faces and *hands* clean; second, get up early;

DAISY

(*quickly*)

Let 's move our chairs back now, and put the table off in a corner and then we can have our dance.

[*All move chairs from table. Girls take plates and cups, etc., to cupboard. Boys move table to rear of room.*

NAN

(*moving chairs to walls*)

I will take Mr. Bangs and teach him the polka.

DAISY

Mr. Blake, will you take a chair and play for the dancing?

NAT

Yes, ma'am. (*Takes harmonica from pocket and plays.*)

Teddy

TOMMY

(*to* NAN)

I expect I shall tear your skirt, ma'am.

NAN

I expect you will. (*Pins up her skirt with large pin, and they begin to dance.*)

TOMMY

(*gasping*)

Please don't go too fast, ma'am!

[NAN'S *skirt keeps falling down, has to be repinned.*

DEMI

(*to* DAISY)

Shall I invite you or the Princess to dance, Dai — Mrs. Smith?

DAISY

(*sits in rocking-chair, folds hands*)

Thank you, Mr. Brooke, I will not dance.

TEDDY

Here 's my Danny! Here he is.

MRS. BHAER

(*flourishing handkerchief after dab at eyes as they enter*)

Hail, the conquering hero!

NAT

(*excitedly*)

And he did it all for me! To save me from having my feelings hurt!

DAN

Oh, 't was n't anything.

NAN AND TOMMY

(*stop dancing*)

'T was, too!

TOMMY

I say, three cheers for Dan!

DEMI

nd DAISY *stop dancing*)

We, too.

BHAER, DAN *with* TEDDY *and* T *in centre.* PROFESSOR BHAER, *arm* nd PRINCESS *at left.* DAISY *and* MI, NAN *and* TOMMY *holding hands, at right.*

PROFESSOR BHAER

Now then (*raises hand*).

ALL

rrah for Dan! Hurrah! Hur-

. BHAER *waves handkerchief,* DAISY *s off cap and waves,* NAN *waves fan,* SS *waves flowers, as curtain falls.*

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